

More aquatic predators of birds

by CHARLES R. S. PITMAN

Received 2nd January, 1961

PART II

(II) FISH

(A) INDIGENOUS

(a) Large SILURIDS

(i) *Clarias*

AFRICA: UGANDA. Dr. Kai Curry-Lindahl, in Lake Edward (April, 1952), saw a dead Marsh Sandpiper, *Tringa stagnatilis* (Bechstein), which had been thrown into the water to attract a lung-fish (*Protopterus*), taken by a *Clarias* sp., probably *C. lazera* Cuv. and Val.

LAKE VICTORIA. Dr. Philip S. Corbet, when in the East African Fisheries Research Organisation at Jinja, took from the stomach of a *Clarias mossambicus* Peters, 89 cm. in length, a cormorant chick just hatching from the egg—from its size probably that of the White-necked Cormorant, *Phalacrocorax carbo lugubris* (L.), vide (¹⁴: pp. 58–59). Corbet also claims that “Large *C. mossambicus* are known to congregate beneath ambatch trees in which cormorants are nesting, and to feed on disgorged *Haplochromis* dropped by the adult birds when feeding their young”; but see, *ibid* 77 (*), p. 93, the views of African fishermen, and also the next note.

NORTHERN RHODESIA. Mr. V. J. Wilson, a Tsetse Control Officer, when visiting by boat a nesting colony of the African Darter, *Anhinga rufa rufa* (Lacépède et Daudin), saw several nestlings fall into the water, where large *Clarias mossambicus* could be seen swimming just below the surface. The fish swallowed the chicks immediately they struck the water. The fish were not in the least afraid and were evidently waiting to receive casualties, for if he agitated the water with his hand a fish came along at once to investigate.

SOUTH AFRICA. Miss M. Courtenay-Latimer, Director of East London Museum, tells of a shot bird which fell into the Orange river and was at once seized and swallowed by a *Clarias* sp.

(ii) *Silurus glanis* (L.), sometimes called the Sheetfish or Wels.

EUROPE. According to Dr. Kai Curry-Lindahl this silurid “is certainly able to take birds from the surface when hunting in the night, and there are published records of swallowed ducks”.

(b) LUNGFISH (*Protopterus*).

AFRICA: UGANDA. Mr. D. H. Rhodes, Senior Fisheries Officer, describes how a shot snipe which fell in a dam could not be recovered for 20 minutes, during which time nearly all its feathers and most of the flesh had been stripped off. This was believed to have been the work of a *Protopterus*.

But Dr. Curry-Lindahl found no remains of birds in any of the *Protopterus* stomachs he examined on Lake Edward, and he is of the opinion that “Objects floating or swimming on the surface do not in general release attacks from lung fishes”.

(c) TIGER FISH (*Hydrocyon*).

AFRICA: SOUTH AFRICA. Lieut. Col. J. Stevenson-Hamilton (¹⁵: p. 129) referring to Tiger Fish “I have seen large ones rising at swallows, as the latter skimmed the surface of a deep pool”.

Ranger T. B. Oatley (²²: pp. 37-38), in January 1957 at the Ndumu Game Reserve, Natal, records how drinking Swallows, *Hirundo rustica* L. were frequently taken—up to 5 or 6 times in the same afternoon—by an unidentified predator which could only have been a Tiger Fish, *Hydrocyon*, but which was never seen. As a Swallow, one of many, dipped there would be a sudden loud splash, a curtain of spray and one bird less.

(d) NORTHERN PIKE, *Esox Lucius* L.

NORTH AMERICA: CANADA. There is a paper by A. D. Bajkov and A. M. Shortt on "Northern Pike as Predator on Waterfowl and Muskrat" which was sponsored by Ducks Unlimited (Canada). This, together with other records of Pike predation in Canada, is being dealt with in a separate note. This species is also the Pike of Britain and Europe where it is a well-known bird predator.

(B) INTRODUCED

(a) RAINBOW TROUT, *Salmo gairdneri* Richardson.

AFRICA: SOUTHERN RHODESIA. Turnbull-Kemp found a fledgling weaverbird, *Xanthophilus xanthops* (Hartlaub) in a rod-caught trout in the Inyangombe river, at 6,000 ft., in 1955. Fledglings had previously been found in trout stomachs by other members of the staff of the Rhodes-Inyanga Estate, who believe this is not uncommon when young birds leave too early or fall from the nest.

He also has "a record of an unidentified and injured swallow being taken by a Rainbow Trout".

(b) TROUT.

AFRICA: SOUTH AFRICA. J. B. Shephard (¹⁶) describes how a gosling (*Alopochen*) disappeared in the middle of a dam. It appeared to dive, but never came up and it was believed that a large trout had taken it.

(III) CROCODILES

(a) *Crocodylus palustris* Lesson, Marsh Crocodile or 'Mugger'.

ASIA: INDIA. In the Central Provinces, A. A. Dunbar Brander (¹⁷) "Once found eight teal duck inside a crocodile, which had evidently been all swallowed at the same time". The duck in question was presumably the Whistling Teal or Fulvous Tree-Duck, *Dendrocygna bicolor*, for a crocodile would have little opportunity of capturing so many of the much more alert little Cotton Teal, *Nettapus coromandelianus* (Gmelin).

(b) *Crocodylus porosus* Schneider, Estuarine Crocodile.

BRITISH SOLOMON ISLANDS. Mrs. Diana Bradley refers to an irruption of the Australian Pelican, *Pelecanus conspicillatus* Temminck in 1952 during a severe gale in the Solomon Islands. When she visited these islands in 1953 few had survived and it was claimed locally that many had fallen victims to crocodiles.

(c) *Crocodylus niloticus* Laurenti, Nile Crocodile.

AFRICA: UGANDA. Corbet, during May/June 1956, when examining the stomachs of crocodiles killed in Napoleon Gulf, Lake Victoria, found four containing bird remains:— 118 cm. long—feet and culmen of black bird, probably African Moorhen, *Gallinula chloropus* (L.); (ii) 120 cm.—black feathers and filo-plumes; (iii) 162 cm.—black feathers; (iv) 280 cm.—one large White-necked Cormorant, *Phalacrocorax carbo*.

KENYA. Richard Tjader (¹⁸: p. 273) found "two pink-coloured

flamingos" in the stomach of a crocodile which was shot at Lake Hannington. Mrs. Susan McKay writes "Several times we have found flamingo feathers in the stomachs of crocodiles" shot in Ferguson Gulf, Lake Rudolf. On Central Island in this lake a crocodile about 6 ft. long was seen to stalk a spoonbill, *Platalea* sp. standing on a rock a few feet above the water. The crocodile came behind it and with a sudden snap caught it; then it plunged back into the water with the white feathers clearly visible either side of its jaws like a huge set of whiskers. It swam with its head up for some time and then suddenly submerged complete with bird and was not seen again.

Colonel R. Meinertzhagen (¹⁹: p. 475) records an interesting case of a crocodile preying on the Black-faced Sandgrouse, *Pterocles decoratus* (Cabanis).

TANGANYIKA. The late Capt. C. H. B. Grant told me of an astonishing experience in 1930 on Lake Tanganyika when he noticed that a Knob-nosed Goose, *Sarkidiornis melanotos* (Pennant) flying close to the surface was directly approaching a basking crocodile. The crocodile opened its mouth and into it went the bird, the crocodile immediately dived and was not seen again. Capt. Grant remarked that the blow on the crocodile's throat must have been tremendous.

NYASALAND. In Sept. 1957, in the Ruo river, Sweeney shot a four-foot crocodile which contained the remains of what was believed to be a Red-billed Duck, *Anas erythrorhyncha* Gmelin.

NORTHERN RHODESIA. According to Mr. C. W. Benson, the "waterhen" *ibid* 77 (⁸), p. 122 was identified by him as Allen's Gallinule, *Porphyrio alleni* (Thomson). Benson has also provided details of avian remains in eleven other crocodiles out of the large number examined by Dr. Hugh Cott:— (i) goose remains; (ii) fragments of *Streptopelia* or *Turtur* feathers, from the Luangwa area; (iii) also from the Luangwa, feathers of possibly an Estrildine finch; (iv) from the same area, *Streptopelia* feathers, probably the Cape Turtle Dove, *S. capicola* (Sundevall); (v) feathers of the Darter, *Anhinga rufa* in two specimens from the Luangwa Valley; (vi) remains of a Purple Gallinule, *Porphyrio alba* (White) from Kafue Flats, near Mazabuka; (vii) feathers of *Anhinga rufa*, from two Barotseland specimens; (viii) mangled remains of probably *Phalacrocorax* sp. from Kafue Flats, near Mazabuka; and (ix) feathers of the Long-tailed Cormorant, *Phalacrocorax africanus* (Gmelin), from Kafue Flats.

Mr. J. M. C. Uys, on 2nd November 1960 in the Busanga Flats region (approx. 14° 10' S.: 25° 46' E.), saw a small crocodile of 0.73 metres with an *Actophilornis africanus* (Gmelin) in its mouth. As he approached it dropped the bird and submerged. But it quickly resurfaced, grabbed its prey and disappeared.

SOUTHERN RHODESIA. Observations made by Mr. Gerald Davison and his father in the Wankie National Park:— (i) 7ft. crocodile shot in Sept. 1957 in the Chowe river contained 26 Red-billed Quelea, *Quelea quelea* (L.); (ii) 4½ ft. crocodile was seen to catch a Blacksmith Plover, *Hoplopterus armatus* (Burchell) at Nyamandhlovu Pan; and (iii) on Dom Pan, 8½ ft. crocodile was seen to take a pelican, *Pelecanus* sp.

SOUTH AFRICA: ZULULAND. About 1904-05, Capt. C. H. B. Grant was after fighting ducks by the Umfolosi river. He shot thirteen,

all falling into a small pond, and as each bird struck the water and turned over head down it was seized by a crocodile and disappeared.

(IV) MONITOR LIZARD (*Varanus niloticus*)

AFRICA: SUDAN. In July 1953, in the Nuba Mountains, Kordofan, Sweeney saw a Nile monitor devouring a small wader.

UGANDA. In March 1956, Corbet found bird remains in the stomach of a specimen killed in a garden at Jinja (Lake Victoria) (¹⁴: p. 59).

KENYA. Corbet, in April 1956, also found bird remains in a specimen which was floating dead in Lake Victoria at the mouth of the Nzoia river (¹⁴: p. 59).

TANGANYIKA. In 1950, on the Mkulumuzi river near Tanga, Sweeney saw a monitor eating a "largish" bird, which was not identified.

SOUTHERN RHODESIA. In 1953, at the Robert Mcllwaine National Park (4,495 ft.), Turnbull-Kemp found two domestic fowl eggs in the stomach of a *V. niloticus*; and he also has a record of one of these monitors seizing and carrying off a Dabchick, *Podiceps ruficollis* (Pallas).

Gerald Davison saw one of these monitors dash out of a hole in a breeding colony of the White-fronted Bee-eater, *Melittophagus bullockoides* (Smith) in a river bank and plunge into the water. It was immediately mobbed furiously by the bee-eaters, who evidently regarded it as an enemy, though it was not possible to confirm that it had been raiding the nests. *Ibid* 77 (*), pp. 123-24, see reaction of Pied Kingfishers.

(to be concluded)

A melanistic Chiffchaff (*Phylloscopus collybita*) in Dorset

by J. S. ASH

Received 19th December, 1960

On 17th April, 1960, several observers staying at the Bird Observatory at Portland Bill, Dorset, watched a small very dark warbler which they were unable to identify. I found the bird in the afternoon and watched it at close range in the field, where it could be compared with several typical Chiffchaffs (*Phylloscopus collybita*). The following field description was later confirmed in the hand after the bird had been caught in a mist net:—similar in size to Chiffchaff, the general colour being smoky (greyish) brown, the underparts paler; top of crown dark greyish brown (darker than mantle); cheeks and ear coverts much mottled with darker colouration, and much the same colour as the greyish brown mantle; rump, olive green, showing up distinctly in flight; a shiny grey area on each closed wing was formed by the pale edges of remiges; a yellow patch at carpal joint; whole of underparts dark greyish white except for tinge of yellow on under tail coverts and a much paler throat (in the hand, the breast, flanks and belly were flecked with a few indistinct streaks of yellow); the faintest trace of a paler supercilium reaching from half-way between the base of the mandible and eye to just above the eye, and no prominent dark line through the eye; a dark brown bill with a pale streak along the junction of the mandibles; legs very dark, but not shiny; and a forked tail which was seen in the hand to be due to very abraded central rectrices.